

THE HISTORY OF COMBATIVES

HISTORY OF MARTIAL ARTS

1-1. Where do the martial arts come from? Most people would answer that they come from the orient. The truth is that every culture that has a need for martial arts has them. We have fighting manuals from medieval Europe that show many of the same techniques that we teach today. The ancient Greeks had wrestling, boxing and the pancrathalon. There are paintings on the walls of Egyptian tombs that are over four thousand years old showing both armed and unarmed fighting techniques that would seem familiar to many of today's martial artists (Figure 1-1)

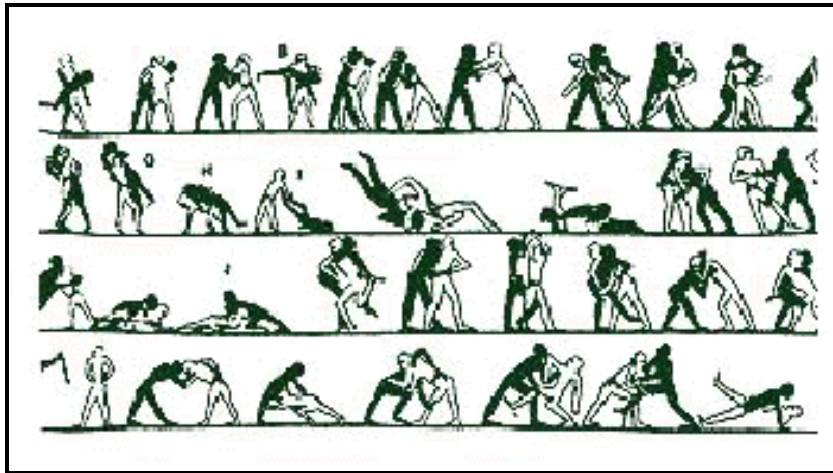


Figure 1-1. Ancient Egyptian paintings that demonstrates fighting techniques.

JITSU VS. DO

1-2. There are some very instructive things about their history that are a microcosm of martial arts in general and that are very useful in understanding American attitudes about martial arts in particular.

1-3. Every Japanese martial art ends with either the word Jitsu or Do, for example Jiu-Jitsu/Judo, Kenjitsu/Kendo, Aikijitsu/ Aikido. The original arts all end with Jitsu which means the art or technique. They were created out of the necessity of a violent time, when there was a definite need for fighting ability. The entire reason for the existence of the training was to produce competent fighters.

1-4. As Japanese society became more settled and peaceful, the ability to fight well became less important. This was true even for members of the Warrior class, the Samurai. This, and the modernization of the Japanese military, resulted eventually in the banning of the wearing of the swords that were the badge of samurai rank, effectively making the warrior class the same as every one else.

1-5. This meant that there were thousands of men who had spent their entire lives training to fight who had no real need for their martial abilities. Most of them simply stopped training all together and became normal members of society, but a few looked deeper at the results of their training. They realized that they had gained much more than just the ability to fight by it. Training in the martial arts had made them in to the men that they were.

1-6. This then became the new reason for training. No longer was producing competent fighters of primary concern. The principle goal was to produce better people. One very good example of this is Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo. As a young man Kano became an expert in several systems of JuJitsu. However, not only was he an expert at Jujitsu, but he was also a teacher. He was director of the

Tokyo Higher Normal School (precursor of the present Tokyo University of Education) for twenty three years and Chief of the Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education

1-7. As Kano grew in his knowledge of Jujitsu, he realized that it could be used as a tool in developing better, and more well rounded, people. With this in mind he formatted the Jujitsu that he had learned into a better teaching tool and called it Judo. So the main difference between the Jujitsu that he learned and the Judo that he taught was the purpose. His teachers were mostly concerned with his fighting ability and skills. He on the other hand was more concerned with building the character of his students

THE MODERN MARTIAL ARTS

1-8. Although we have been talking specifically about the Japanese martial arts, this evolution from Jitsu to Do or in other words from concentrating on actual fighting ability to actual ability being of only secondary importance, is indicative of most of the modern martial arts world. If you read or listen to almost anything put out by someone in the contemporary martial arts community about training, it will almost invariably be colored by this change in the reason for training.

1-9. To put things in perspective, imagine an accountant somewhere in America trying to decide whether or not martial art training is practical. If training cost him \$100 a month, he will spend \$1200 per year, what are the odds that he will be robbed in a way that his training could stop for \$1200 per year. Therefore from a fiscal perspective it makes more sense to save his money. Now consider his chances of becoming injured in training, as compared with his chances of becoming injured by an assault and you soon see that, if you take away the notion that they may join the military, in a practical sense it really doesn't make much sense for the average citizen of a country at peace to train in the martial arts.

1-10. There are of course many good reasons to train that have little to do with the practical need for fighting ability. There are thousands of people across America who is training to fight with a samurai sword. Very few of them believe they may need to defend themselves against sword wielding ninjas on the way to their car at the mall. They train because they enjoy it. For the same reason that people play baseball, or re-enact civil war battles or any other leisure activity. This of course is completely different from the situation of the Army.

1-11. Modern Combatives training therefore stands apart from the vast majority of martial arts training in that producing actual fighting ability is of primary concern. Both the mental and physical benefits of training gain their worth from their usefulness in producing more capable soldiers.

HISTORY OF COMBATIVES TRAINING

1-12. The first U.S. Army Combatives Manual was published in 1852. It was a translation of a French bayonet fighting manual by a young Captain George McClelland. Since that time the Army has always had Combatives training doctrine although not always successful combatives training. Bayonet fencing, as outlined in the 1852 manual remained the universally accepted training method, not only in the U.S. Army but in every European style army in the world until its effectiveness was shown to be lacking on the battlefields and in the trenches of World War I.

BAYONET FENCING

1-13. Bayonet Fencing was a skill based system. Competitions were held regularly across the Army and it was accepted even outside of the Army, becoming the fourth international recognized form of fencing, with Foil, Epee' and Saber and was even an Olympic sport until 1936.

TRENCH WARFARE

1-14. Trench warfare changed all of that. In the confined space of a trench the techniques and weapons designed with the fencing strip in mind proved themselves worse than useless. It didn't take Soldiers long to realize they were better off with an e-tool and a bag full of grenades.

EARLY FOREIGN INFLUENCE

1-15. This time saw the first attempts to teach unarmed fighting to Soldier in an organized way on any kind of large scale. There were several attempts to teach Jiu-Jitsu and Judo which had been known in the United States since even before President Theodore Roosevelt had trained with Yamashita Yoshitsugu, one of the best students of Kano Jigoro the founder of Judo. Theodore Roosevelt actually had a “judo room” at the White House. Yamashita later taught at the U.S. Naval Academy. In 1920 a training manual was published at Ft. Benning, Georgia written by CPT Allan Corstorphin Smith who had been awarded a Judo black belt from the Kodokan in Japan in 1916 and who was the hand-to-hand combat instructor at the Infantry School.

1-16. With the rapid expansion of armies demanded by the World War, there was little time available to teach the average Soldier the complex techniques of Judo and Jiu-Jitsu taught by CPT Smith and others. Because of this and the failure of Bayonet fencing as a training method for trench warfare the Army lost faith in skill based Combatives training. In the interwar years such non-skill based training methods as Pugal sticks and the bayonet assault course gained prominence.

WORLD WAR II

1-17. World War II saw a flowering of attempts at successful Combatives training. Many of the top names from boxing and wrestling at the time were brought in to train the various services. Most had very limited success, once again because of the limited amount of training time available with the demands of fielding an Army of several million men.

1-18. The most successful programs were offshoots from the British Commando training taught by William E Fairbairn and Eric A. Sykes. These two had trained the police force in Shanghai, China before the war and with their depth of real world experience, Fairbairn was also a second degree black belt in Judo, had been brought back to Britain early in the war. Personally in the case of Fairbairn, and through their American protégé COL Rex Applegate, their program of practicing a limited number of simple, effective techniques, emphasis on aggressiveness and stressing the incivility of real fights (COL Applegate wrote a manual titled “Kill or Get Killed” in 1943 and Fairbairn often referred to what he taught as “Gutter Fighting”) They were able to somewhat overcome the limitations of limited training time. COL Applegate also used feedback from the field to adjust the curriculum. By the end of the war thousands of Soldiers had been trained in their methods.

POST WAR YEARS

1-19. With the drawdown at the end of World War II Combatives training in the Army virtually ceased. The lack of a train-the-trainer program, virtually all of the training had been done by a very small amount of instructors such as Fairbairn and Applegate, and the lack of a follow on training plan other than continuing to practice the same limited number of techniques led to the slow death of any meaningful training. There was a Field Manual, however, actual training was reduced to initial entry training and was taught by drill sergeants with very little official training. Quality inevitably plummeted.

1-20. Periodic attempts were made, especially as martial arts became more popular in the United States to introduce various training methods and techniques to the force. These attempts were generally fruitless because of the lack of any mechanism for insuring quality instruction or training. There were a couple of notable exceptions, the Air Force and the Marine Corps.

Air Force Instructor Course

1-21. The Air Force Strategic Air Command under General Curtis E. LeMay implemented a Judo program beginning in 1950. In 1952 the first class of 13 instructors went to Japan to train at the Kodokan, the premier Judo school in Tokyo. Within the next ten years there were more than 160 black belt judo instructors within the command. Between 1959 and 1962 there was a judo instructor course at Stead Air Force Base, Nevada which graduated nearly ten thousand instructors from a five week

course. The curriculum included Judo, Aikido, Karate, air police techniques, air crew self defense, judo tournament procedures, code of conduct and training methods classes.

Marine Corps Instructor Course

1-22. The Marine Corps adopted the Linear Infighting Neurological Override Engagement (LINE) Combat System in 1988. Primarily designed by MSgt Ron Donvito, the LINE system was a systematic way to teach and practice techniques derived from traditional martial arts in an organized fashion. Techniques were presented in subsets, termed ditties; each subset was made up of related techniques such as defense to grabs or defense to punches. The training was done in unit formation which facilitated training in Initial Entry Training and other institutional environments. There was also an instructor training course at Quantico Virginia.

Follow-On Training

1-23. Both Air Force and Marine Corps programs had limited success but died out or were replaced for various reasons. The Air Force program was built around a club system. Instructors were placed at gyms around the force. All Airmen were given basic instruction in the institutional training pipeline and follow on training was made available at the post gymnasiums. This training plan resulted in a reasonably large group with real expertise; in fact the instructor cadre formed an Air Force “Black Belt Association” that eventually outgrew the Air Force becoming the “United States Judo Association” which is the largest Judo organization in America. However, the club nature of the training meant that real skill was essentially limited to those who were self motivated to attend the training sessions. This, the fact that the training methodology of judo was not built around producing proficient fighters quickly, and the reliance on the enthusiasm of local commanders meant that the skill level of the average Airman remained low. Eventually command influence waned and the program within the Air Force died.

1-24. Although the LINE system had more wide spread success than even the SAC Judo program, it suffered from different deficiencies. Principle among these was its training methodology which was built around formal methods of instruction best suited for institutional training and insistence that every technique be “deadly”. A reliance on formal training settings and formations which are less likely in regular units than in an institutional setting meant that LINE training must compete with other formal training events such as Physical training. The result was that training was less likely to be conducted in the force. The insistence on “deadly” techniques did not fit the needs of the Marine Corps or the demands of the modern battlefield. Additionally, the techniques of the LINE system, defense to a grab, punch, chokes, etc, which had been drawn from civilian martial arts, were reactive in nature. Reactive techniques, where the enemy initiates the action and the Soldier must react, are the norm for self defense systems and passive martial arts of the civilian world. They do however have serious drawbacks as a basis for a combatives system.

MODERN COMBATIVE TECHNIQUES

1-25. In 1995 when the Commander of the 2nd Ranger Battalion ordered a reinvigoration of combatives training within the battalion, it didn’t take long for serious problems with the techniques in The Army’s existing combatives manual to surface. There was the general feeling among the Rangers that they would not work and that it was a waste of valuable training time.

1-26. The Army had a combatives manual, FM 21-150 (1992), but had no program to produce qualified instructors or any system for implementing the training in units other than the vague approach of leaving it to local commander’s discretion. Unit instructors inevitably ended up being whatever martial arts hobbyist happened to be in that unit and the training progressed along the lines of whatever civilian martial arts those people had studied in their off duty time. In most units there was no training at all.

1-27. A committee was formed headed by Matt Larsen to develop a more effective program. J. Robinson, a Ranger combat veteran during Vietnam and the head coach at the University of Minnesota wrestling program, came out to evaluate the emerging program and gave some valuable advice, mainly

that a successful program must have a competitive aspect in order to motivate Soldiers to train and that it must include “live” sparing in order to be useful in growing a combative culture. The committee began to develop a program based around wrestling, boxing and the various martial arts they had experienced such as Judo and Muay Thai. Eventually, after looking at many different systems, a small group of Rangers were sent to train at the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu Academy in Torrance, California, made famous from their victories in the Ultimate Fighting Championships.

1-28. The Jiu-Jitsu taught at the Gracie Academy fit many of the battalions needs. The Gracie’s had been originally taught by Meada Mitsuyo who was a representative of the Kodokan but had added the concept of a hierarchy of dominant body positions which gave both a strategy to win fights and an organized framework for learning. It was therefore easy to learn. It also had a competitive form, and was proven effective within the realm of one on one unarmed arena fighting or challenge matches. It did however have the major problem of being principally designed for the venue that had made it famous.

1-29. Rorion and Royce Gracie made three trips to the battalion over the next couple of years and a few Rangers made the trip down to Torrance to train on their own. During this time Larsen was developing a drill based training program that became an essential element in the “Modern Army Combatives” program.

1-30. As the system matured he began to realize what it was about the techniques of Jiu-Jitsu that made them work, namely that you could practice them at full speed against a fully resistant opponent. With this, techniques that do not work are quickly abandoned for those that do. He also began to draw from other martial arts that share various levels of this “live” training to fill in the tactical gaps in the Jiu-Jitsu learned from the Gracie’s which had been primarily focused on unarmed ground grappling.

1-31. Exploring the various training methods of the other—feeder arts—the ways they complemented each other and exposed each others weaknesses become clear. The concept of positional dominance from Jiu-Jitsu was expanded to the other ranges of combat and blended with techniques from wrestling, boxing, Muay Thai, judo to name just a few. With weapons fighting lessons from Kali and the western martial arts and the Rangers’ own experience from years in the infantry including the limited combat of that era, by September 11th, 2001 the basis of a totally integrated system of “Close Quarters Combat” had been developed and a sound foundation laid from which to learn the lessons of the battlefields to come.

US ARMY COMBATIVES SCHOOL

1-32. As the program grew technically, its success made it grow outside of the battalion, at first to the rest of the Ranger Regiment, then throughout the infantry and eventually, with the publishing of the new Field Manual FM 3-25.150 (2002) written by Matt Larsen, became doctrine Army wide.

1-33. The Commander of the 11th Infantry Regiment, which was responsible for conducting the infantry officer education courses on Ft. Benning, COL Mike Ferriter, brought Larsen over to establish a training course for the cadre of the Regiment. This would eventually become the Level I combatives instructor’s course. As the training spread through the unit, the need became clear for an additional course to provide more supervision of the training. This would become the level II course. These courses were limited to ground grappling because of skepticism from senior commanders at the time. Many leaders who had grown up during the period after Vietnam but before September 11th 2001 had the mistaken idea that there was a division between the “Combat” and the “Non-combat” Soldiers. Attempts to integrate combatives and close quarters battle were looked upon as unnecessary, the main point being to build confidence in Soldiers just as it had been with pugil stick fighting and the bayonet assault course that had been around since World War One.

1-34. When fighting started in Afghanistan, what would become the U.S. Army Combatives School at Ft. Benning Georgia had already been established to train instructors for the various Infantry schools at Ft. Benning and the first two levels of Combatives Instructor qualification were in place. The need to push the training into operational units and to make it more directly applicable to the battlefield, as well as to provide higher level instructors for an Army spread around the world, demanded the development of a longer instructor certification course for battalion master trainers. This would

become the level III course. An interview format and procedures to draw out the lessons that might be missed in a simple narrative was developed and post action interviews with Soldiers who had been involved in hand-to-hand fighting were begun. What equipment were the Soldiers wearing, the tactical situation and other questions. Hundreds of these interviews were conducted and the curriculum evolved with the lessons learned. Eventually the need to manage combatives programs in large units such as brigades or divisions necessitated some instructors would need a higher level of training. This would become the level IV instructor course.

A LEARNING PROGRAM

1-35. The program, in this basic form, continued to spread throughout the Army. There were, however, those who continued to oppose it. The primary reason was the perception that it was not directly relevant to the battlefield because of the focus on ground grappling in the early stages of training and the tendency of young Soldiers to identify too closely with the civilian Mixed Martial Arts world, which has very little to do with Soldiering. The tactical training methods taught in the level III and IV courses were slow to become the norm out in the force. Because of this, although the program was extremely popular in some portions of the Army, it had been in danger of going the way of the Strategic Air Command program and failing in its promise of bringing realistic combatives training to every Soldier.

1-36. In 2009 now Major General Mike Ferriter became the Commanding General of Ft. Benning. In order to revitalize the program, he brought together combatives training experts from around the Army and the civilian experts who had helped the program in the past in a symposium to look at improving the program. A major contributor in aiding the process of going from the old program to a more tactical program was Greg Thompson, the head instructor for the SOCP School located at Ft Bragg, NC. Mr Thompson spent many hours refining the tactical instruction given at the USACS culminating in many new techniques being added to the new program. The curriculum of what had been the level I and II courses were updated with techniques and training methods which had only been taught in the level III, IV and SOCP courses, with the new courses' names being changed to the Basic Combatives Course and the Tactical Combatives Course. The distinction between "Combat" and "Non-Combat" Soldiers had been shown to be a false dichotomy.

1-37. The end state is a learning program that constantly gathers the best training methods and techniques from wherever they can be found, vets them through the combat experience of the programs instructors and commanders, and propagates them around the Army through a network of experienced instructors.